UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social
Council

GENERAL

E/ECE/1256
28 February 1992

Original: ENGLISH

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

Forty-seventh session
(Provisional Agenda item 2(f))

COMMISSION'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE UNITED NATIONS PROGRAMMES DESIGNED TO ASSIST COUNTRIES OF THE REGION WHICH ARE DEVELOPING FROM THE ECONOMIC POINT OF VIEW AND DEVELOPING COUNTRIES OF OTHER REGIONS

Note by the Executive Secretary

1. The activities described below are considered to be of particular interest to ECE countries which are developing from the economic point of view and to developing countries of other regions. In the past year 24 countries from other regions have participated in 99 ECE meetings, in particular in the sectors of trade, energy and transport. Nine of these were countries of the ESCAP region, 9 of the ECA region, 5 of the ECLAC region and one of the ESCWA region.

Economic developments, problems and prospects

2. Radical economic reforms in central and east European countries, and the importance attached to their transition to a market economy and their integration into the European and global economies have created a need for economic analysis by the secretariat akin to that undertaken for the countries of the region which are developing from the economic point of view and developing countries of other regions.

GE.92- 20573 /7293a

3. Data newly available shows that the overall level of development of most of the centrally planned economies was much lower than officially reported or assumed, and for some of them it was similar to that of developing countries. Hence the secretariat's work concerned with the transition of these countries to a market system is relevant to countries which are developing from the economic point of view.

4. A considerable part of the forthcoming publication on Social and Economic Aspects of Aging of the Population is devoted to the less-developed countries of the region. The comparative analysis of the problems is also significant since the problems of aging transcend the usually understood frontiers of social and economic systems and the stages of development. Several other population projects carried out with financial support from UNFPA, for example on fertility and family surveys and population related policies, pay considerable attention to the countries of the region which are developing from the economic point of view.

Agriculture

5. The Working Party on Standardization of Perishable Produce and Quality Development provides countries which are developing from the economic point of view with an opportunity to participate in the elaboration of international commercial standards for products of special interest to them, especially fresh or dried fruit and vegetables; it also offers advice and assistance regarding quality control for exports.

6. The secretariat and the various joint ECE/FAO working parties provide direct or indirect inputs to FAO's work aimed principally at developing countries in the fields of agriculture and food statistics, sustainable agricultural and rural development, land use, farm management, selected aspects of soil fertility, the use of water resources and fertilizers.

Timber

7. Through its seminars and teams of specialists for countries of the region which are developing from the economic point of view and developing countries in other regions, the Joint FAO/ECE/ILO Committee on Forest Technology, Management and Training provides practical information in the field of forest operations and management. A publication was issued in 1990 on "Afforestation Techniques in Mediterranean Countries". The International Forest Fire News is published twice yearly and contains information from all parts of the world. A seminar was held in Greece in November 1991 on forest fire prevention, land use and people, at which the socio-economic aspects of forest fire prevention received special attention. The proceedings will be published in 1992.

8. The Timber Committee's forest product market analysis deals, inter alia, with the ECE region's trade with the tropical timber producing countries from both the short- and long-term perspective. The latter covers imports and utilization of tropical hardwoods from sustainably managed forests and involves cooperation with FAO and the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO).

Environment

9. The Senior Advisers on Environmental and Water Problems have prepared, for adoption at their fifth session and subsequent signature, draft Conventions on environmental issues of growing significance also to developing countries: the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes and the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents. The 1991 Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context is being implemented on an interim basis, pending its entry into force. Taking into account specific provisions of these Conventions it is expected that their implementation would promote the exchange of relevant technologies, research results and experience to countries which are developing from an economic point of view.

10. The 1991 Espoo Ministerial Statement, adopted at the fourth session of the Senior Advisers, fully recognized the special responsibilities of ECE member countries in relation to global environmental problems and expressed their readiness to take a lead in the effort towards solving these problems and to assist developing countries in their environmental and development efforts, focusing this contribution on the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and, in particular, on the desirability of completing the framework convention on climate change in time for signing at that Conference.

11. With a view to assisting countries in eastern and southern Europe with their efforts to control air pollution from stationary sources and, in particular, from burning fossil fuels for energy generation, UNDP, with ECE as executing agency, concluded in 1991 a three-year project on environmental management with the emphasis on air pollution control. The project was designed to reflect the specific needs of Albania, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Turkey and Yugoslavia. In 1991 the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic joined the project. Cooperation was enhanced in the field of exchange of technology with a view, inter alia, to upgrading individual national capabilities for implementing the provisions of the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution and its Protocols.

Human Settlements

12. The Committee on Human Settlements is finalizing two publications which are of practical value to developing countries: (a) a compendium of policy conclusions and recommendations emerging from the past 10 years of ECE activities in the field of human settlements, and (b) housing policy guidelines.

Industrial development

13. A study was published by UNIDO in cooperation with ECE on the outcome of the ECE Seminar on Computer Integrated Manufacturing, held in Botevgrad (Bulgaria) in 1989. The recently issued study on Food-processing Machinery, including Packaging Techniques (ECE/ENG.AUT/43) addressed issues relevant to the restructuring of food industries and the introduction of new food technologies in developing countries.

International trade and development finance

14. The Committee on the Development of Trade, in December 1991, discussed the trade problems of ECE member countries which are developing from the economic point of view on the basis of a report on the workshop held in Bucharest (Romania) in September 1991 on the subject of foreign trade and payment reforms in the economies in transition. The Committee invited the secretariat to complete its study of the possibilities of stimulating bilateral and other trade and investment relations among interested countries on a regional basis.

15. Conscious of the global importance of facilitation for improving the international trade of all countries, the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1989/118, called on the regional commissions, jointly with UNCTAD, to formulate a project for interregional cooperation in this area that would promote the reduction, simplification and harmonization of formalities, procedures and documentation, in particular through the phased application of the United Nations rules for Electronic Data Interchange for Administration, Commerce and Transport, UN/EDIFACT.

16. A project document for interregional cooperation, prepared by the regional commissions and UNCTAD, was submitted to the Council at its second regular session of 1990. At its second regular session in July 1991, the Council, recalling its previous resolutions on the subject, adopted resolution 1991/76 by which it requested the regional commissions, jointly with UNCTAD, to elaborate specific proposals relating to interregional cooperation in this field and present them to bilateral donors and funding organizations.

17. The ECE, together with the other regional commissions and UNCTAD, is in the process of finalizing such project proposals at both the regional and global levels. Conscious, however, that a solid foundation for UN/EDIFACT at the regional level should be created before proceeding to its global application, the ECE secretariat will start with the development of the training component of the regional project applicable to ECE economies in transition as well as to other ECE countries where facilitation of international trade procedures is still at an early stage.

Energy issues

18. The ECE/UNDP project on Solar Applications and Energy Efficiency in Building Design and Town Planning was concluded, as planned, on 31 December 1991. This Project enhanced the professional skills of practising architects, engineers and town planners by making greater use of passive solar heating and natural cooling techniques. The Project resulted in the creation of an international network of institutions for low energy building design; a state-of-the-art survey of energy use in the built environment; a simple computer programme for energy efficienct building design; a design guide and a computer manual; as well as a series of international training courses in participating countries.

19. The ECE/UNDP Project on International Cooperative Research on Low-calorie Solid-fuel Technology drew to an end, as planned, on 31 December 1991. The Project aimed at the development of technologies for the efficient and environmentally-sound utilization of brown coal and lignite, thereby enhancing

the contribution of indigenous sources of energy to domestic needs. Its outputs consisted of coordinated research between specialized institutes focusing on the testing of different kinds of low-grade coals, the application of low-emission combustion processes, the upgrading of brown coal and lignite, corrision and erosion during combustion, waste disposal and utilization. Study tours were organized as well as training courses, fellowships, ad hoc meetings and workshops. The Project's Steering Committee concluded its work with proposals to ECE and UNDP for international programmes on fluidized-bed gasification of brown coal and lignite, low-NO_x burners and pre-combustion preparation of solid fuels.

20. The ECE Seminar on Solar Power Systems took place in Alushta (former USSR) in April 1991. Participants reviewed the present status and development prospects of solar photovoltaic, solar thermal and solar hybrid systems and addressed the future applications and viability of solar power. A Round Table considered the role of solar energy for environmentally-sustainable energy supply as well as possibilities for international cooperation. The Seminar drafted recommendations to Governments, industry and international organizations including the United Nations and ECE (ENERGY/SEM.10/2).

21. The Working Party on Gas concluded a first study on the integration and extension of European gas grids, including interconnections with non-European suppliers around the Mediterranean. The findings of the Symposium on the Use of Compressed Natural Gas (CNG), Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) and LPG as Fuels for Internal Combustion Engines (Kiev (Ukraine), September 1991) are also of relevance to developing countries which consider using such fuel. The Working Party on Coal adopted a Code for the Draught Survey of Coal-carrying Cargoes, of interest to coal-exporting developing countries.

22. Under the auspices of the Committee on Energy, a Meeting in March 1991 considered an interregional project entitled "Global Energy Efficiency 21 - an inter-regional approach", which would be submitted to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) for approval. The project aims at enhancing the planning, administrative, economic, technical and financial capacities of developing countries to develop and implement efficient energy systems themselves. It would be implemented by the regional commissions.

Transport, communications and tourism

23. In the transport sector the ECE Regional Transport Adviser has carried out a series of missions to the countries of the region developing from an economic point of view to provide advice and assistance in the development of transport programmes and infrastructure.

24. Since 1982 the ECE, in cooperation with ECA, has continued to implement Council resolutions on the Europe-Africa permanent link through the Strait of Gibraltar, and presented a global evaluation of the studies and work relating to the project to the Council's second regular session in 1991. The same session approved a resolution (1991/74) requesting the Executive Secretaries of ECA and ECE to prepare an evaluation report on the studies relating to the project in the period 1982-1993 for submission to the Council in 1993.

25. A Guide to the Compilation of Transport Statistics in Market Economies has been prepared by the secretariat to assist developing countries and countries in transition in setting up new statistical systems commensurate with the requirements of modern transport markets. Work is also underway, in cooperation with UNDP, to establish national transport data systems which will, on a harmonized basis, provide institutional and private investors with the necessary data to allow rational decision making.

26. The secretariat has also continued to provide assistance to developing countries of other regions in the field of transport. Joint action has been initiated between the ECE and ESCAP secretariats to promote the adoption and implementation of various international legal instruments in Asia, such as the Vienna Conventions of 1968, the TIR Convention of 1975 and the International Convention on the Harmonization of Frontier Controls of 1982, with a view to providing common legal regimes applicable to intercontinental land transport between Europe and Asia.

Statistics

27. The ECE, as executing agency, has managed the ECE/UNDP Statistical Computing Project, Phase 2 (SCP-2) and ensured, in close cooperation with the Steering Committee and the lead countries, the finalization of the programmed outputs of the Project. Twenty-three member countries participated in the SCP-2, of which seven were IPF countries. Thirty-two final outputs are currently available and have been distributed to 24 countries in Africa, Europe and South America.

28. At the request of the SCP-2 Steering Committee, a regional Transition Project on Applied Statistical Computing in Central and East European Countries, dealing with the adaptation of statistical services to market-economy conditions, was elaborated and forwarded to UNDP for the Fifth UNDP Programming Cycle. The proposal was included in the draft UNDP regional programme.